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ABSTRACT

Teachers can use basic counseling skills to reduce classroom friction, increase motivation, and increase class and program cohesiveness. Affective development can be emphasized as well as cognitive development and can be a direct product of the relationship between student and teacher. Programs that are successful in producing affective change attack both attitudes and behaviors simultaneously and should be available to teachers who can then provide them for their students. Through such programs teachers can learn these counseling skills to promote their students' affective development: (1) open questions, (2) indirect questions, (3) restatement, (4) clarification, and (5) reflection. Care should be taken so that teachers do not misuse these techniques either by sending students mixed messages (using one technique to motivate a student to write a personal and meaningful paper and another very different technique to criticize the composition) or by trying to be all things to the students, neglecting to refer those students with serious developmental problems to professional counselors or therapists. (AEA)

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COUNSELING SKILLS FOR INSTRUCTORS

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"The remedial/developmental program at Rockland Community College underwent a developmental process under the leadership of Dr. Margaret Martin. The process began with the offering of remedial courses in the summer which were required for selected entering freshmen. It shifted to a summer compensatory program administered through the Psychology Department in 1964, becoming a year round remedial program in 1968, and finally a developmental/remedial program with its own coordinator and staff in 1972. Many of the faculty and staff were uncomfortable with the realities of an open enrollment policy in an institution which serves 8,000 students a year including approximately 750 remedial/developmental students.

Partially because the program was an outgrowth of the Psychology Department which was clinically oriented, the early remedial program was designed to include a counseling component. Historically, therefore, throughout the years there was an attempt to meet affective as well as cognitive objectives. When the program was established as a separate entity in 1972, this philosophy was extended. In addition to the group seminars and individual counseling components, affective objectives are also met indirectly by "caring" instructors using a mastery approach in teaching the skill development components, specifically Communication Skills (reading, writing, study skills). Mathematics Skills, Clinical Modules (additional diagnosis and instruction in spelling, vocabulary development, oral language development, listening, logic and reasoning, and literature), Understanding Human Behavior, Discovering the Community College, and Library Skills.[1]

As Martin and Brown suggest, "while conscientious remedial instructors in the community college did begin to realize the need for the development of affective objectives, most instructors did not design their courses to meet affective as well as cognitive objectives. The achievement of enhanced self concept, for example, was and indirect by-product of the relationship between the student and instructor."[2]

No matter how small the modularized units of instruction, the student will not succeed if he/she does not believe he/she is capable of taking that one small step. For this reason, it is imperative that affective development not be an indirect by-product, but a direct product of the relationship between the student and the instructor. Students spend more time with instructors than with counselors. Few, if any, developmental/remedial programs give equal time to the affective domain. Thus, it is vital for instructors to possess some of the basic counseling skills that will help their students grow both affectively and cognitively.

Roueche and Snow say in Overcoming Learning Problems that "many instructors, counselors, educators, and administrators have come to recognize the importance of self concept development in student learning and that there is a positive relationship between programs incorporating self concept learning and programs in which students persist in college and complete programs to earn degrees and certificates."[3]

It follows, therefore, that the most important set of attitudes which a remedial/developmental program must attempt to change are those associated with the self. Having experienced repeated frustration in dealing with school-related tasks, low achieving students are plagued with negative self-feelings especially as they confront their own inadequacies in mastering basic skills. They have a tendency to continue to pursue a variety of self-defeating behaviors which in turn perpetuate their experiences of frustration and failure. Self-feelings are produced, maintained and strengthened by the feedback which the individual obtains from the environment. Thus, self-feelings are both product and process. They are the product of repeated interactions and repeated feedback from an environment which affirms the individual's valuations of self, and self-feelings are part of the process which determines the kind and quality of behavior in which the individual engages. Obviously, it isn't easy to change an individual's pattern of behavior. It is, however, the very difficulty of changing these patterns which necessitates developing within the remedial/

developmental program specific objectives and strategies for the purpose of facilitating affective change.

Affective change occurs as a result of planning and effort. All the research evidence to date suggests that major affective change only occurs as a result of a systematic program aimed at such change. Major affective change does not occur as a by-product of a good skills program and a well intentioned instructor. Not only does affective change take great effort, it also takes time. How much time and effort would you expect to have to expend in order to change a habit which you had 15-20 years to practice? How many of us find it possible to make change in our behavior even after we become convinced that we need to change? Obviously, making changes isn't easy. We can't imagine ourselves in the changed state; we can't face the "deprivation" associated with achieving our desired goal; we don't think we know how to achieve the desired state--or a hundred and one other reasons (real or imagined) we give ourselves for perpetuating our self-defeating behaviors. The programs which have been successful in producing affective change are those which attack both the attitude and the behavior at the same time. Many of us need feedback from significant others that they care about us and that they find us worthy and able, as well as needing the feedback produced by our new behavior.

Organizations like Weight Watchers and Smoke-Enders attest that many of us require the support, pressure, aid, and trust which the group provides in order to make the changes which we have already become convinced we need to make. If this is true of most of us, is it not doubly true for our students?[4]

Instructors, like students, need a relatively low-risk environment in which to try out new behaviors and to receive feedback from others who experienced or are experiencing similar needs. A suggested format for creation of such an environment is a required three hour weekly group meeting (compensated) which would provide time to develop new skills and promote staff cohesion. Under skilled leadership such a

group could be supportive and growth promoting.

Instructors often mention the need for listening skills for students. However, instructors also have a need for such skills. Accurately hearing the content of the spoken message does not mean one has also accurately heard the affect of that message. The impact on a student of feeling he/she has been heard deeply and understood should not be underestimated. This has been eloquently attested to in Carl Roger's article entitled "Listening".

The level of listening referred to could also be called empathy. Instructors in their attempts to show empathy sometimes identify with the speaker and then there are two people with the same problem or they sympathize and fare no better. To avoid such pitfalls to empathetic understanding, practice in a supportive environment the following basic counseling skills.

OPEN QUESTIONS: How did you feel about this assignment?

vs

You really liked this assignment, didn't you?

The wider latitude allowed by the first question, if asked with sincereity, will often promote more open, deeper levels of communication. The second question invites a "yes" or "no" answer.

INDIRECT QUESTIONS: Math can certainly be difficult.

vs

You find math very difficult, don't you?

As you can see, the first question is not phrased as such but is expressed as an opening statement which allows the respondent even more latitude in his response.

One should focus on listening and understanding the speaker in a way that doesn't interfer with the responses. Try communicating understanding by the following responses.

RESTATEMENT: This technique lets the speaker know what he said was heard, and it may help him to continue speaking. Restatement may be word for word or an accurate summarization.

Student: I never attended one school for more than a year .... First I went to...no, that was just before I moved again ....

Instructor: You moved often and changed schools frequently.

CLARIFICATION: This method puts the student's words in the instructor's words to clarify what the student is having difficulty expressing. Verify with the student to see if you have in fact clarified.

Student: I know I'm not going to pass the test. At least I don't think I will. Then again, maybe I will.

Instructor: You seem uncertain about passing the test.

Student: Yes, that's it.

Be sensitive to the feeling content of what the student is saying, verbally and non-verbally. In addition to the open-ended leads above, the instructor must show empathy for the student's feelings by reflecting them back to the student. In restating, the content of what the student said is echoed.

REFLECTION: The instructor verbalizes the feelings perceived even though not clearly stated by the student.

Student: Your test was unfair. You didn't cover that stuff in class, and it certainly isn't in the book. I'll never pass this stupid class with you as my teacher.

Instructor: You seem really worried that you won't pass the course because you didn't do well on this test.

Focusing on reflecting the other person's feelings not only makes them feel understood but prevents the instructor from being drawn into a potentially explosive discussion.

The foregoing techniques can also increase motivation. Showing empathy for a student's thoughts and feelings will increase the depth and range of communication

the student will be encouraged to attempt. The more personal the oral and written communication, the more likely a student is to invest himself/herself in the effort.

Occasionally, this open-ended approach will generate such a variety of responses that the student will need assistance in focusing on the one area most important to him.

Instructor: You've discussed a number of your thoughts and feelings. Would you share with me the one that is most important to you and why you chose it?

The competent use of these basic skills can keep the instructor from being caught in what transactional analysists describe as a game of "Yes, but..." This is where the instructor offers a solution to a problem and the student replies "yes, but..." Soon the instructor has a problem. The use of these deceptively simple techniques keeps problem ownership with the person who has the problem. It also saves the instructor from the solution giving trap.

The mischief of all this is that while all good things can be well used they can also be misused. For example, an instructor can use these techniques to motivate a student to write a very personal and meaningful paper, but then use a very different technique in the criticism of the composition. The student will feel like he has been sucker-punched. At best, the teacher will have lost credibility, and the student will have lost even more.

Also in the realm of misuse is the instructor who tries to be all things to his students--instructor, counselor and saviour. Due to inherent conflicts of interest, this is not possible. Basic counseling skills when employed by an instructor can reduce classroom friction, increase motivation and increase class and program cohesiveness. They should not be employed in an attempt to work through developmental problems for which a student could be best served by being referred to a professional counselor or therapist.

Excessive referrals to the counselor of students who are considered problematic and time consuming in the classroom can be reduced. The time spent by the instructor incorporating these behaviors and demonstrating them at the beginning of each semester and class will be repaid through a reduction in meaningless dialogues and classroom disruptions. Receiving the positive regard of a significant other will hopefully lead to an improved sense of self. Our sense of self is closely related to our mental image of self. The use of mental imagery can be a useful tool for affective and cognitive development. Before we can learn or change a behavior or attitude, we must first be able to imagine that we are capable of such. The deliberate construction of a step-by-step mental image of new behaviors and attitudes is a process that hopefully the readers of this article are now actively doing. Surely our students are not asking too much if they expect us to model the behaviors we espouse.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Dr. Margaret Martin -- from addendum to "Strategies For Achieving Affective Goals In Programs For Non-traditional Students." Paper presented at the Third Annual Conference on Remedial/Developmental Studies in Post-Secondary Institutions, Chicago, Illinois, March 15, 1979.

[2]Dr. Margaret Martin and Dr. Janet Brown, "Strategies For Achieving Affective Goals In Programs For Non-traditional Students," (Chicago, 1979) p. 4.

[3]John E. Roueche and Jerry J. Snow, Overcoming Learning Problems (San Francisco, 1977), p. 14.

[4]Op.Cit., p. 14.